



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## INTELLECTUAL NOMADISM

BY NORMAN DOUGLAS

---

EVERY now and then the torrents that seam the plateau regions of inner Algeria swell to a river and pour down from the mountains in a seething flood of destruction. So it happened in October, 1904, when part of the French settlement of Ain Sefra was overwhelmed by a flood of this kind.

One of the wrecked buildings was inhabited at that moment by Isabelle Eberhardt, a young lady journalist, Russian by race, Mohammedan by religion; and among its ruins were found certain of her manuscript notes which now form a considerable part of a posthumous volume entitled "*Dans l'Ombre Chaude de l'Islam.*" They were unearthed during the excavations which were undertaken with great care by Lieutenant Paris and found to be disconnected and very much damaged from having lain for several weeks in the mud. In order to attach the pieces Monsieur Barrucand, her friend and editor of an Algerian newspaper, was obliged to string them together by reflections borrowed from her correspondence, from her papers and travel notes. This was the sole method of reconstruction, he says, whereby he could save from definite interment these fragments of Sahara life which reached his hands.

It was a labor of love and well worth performing. A critic has called Isabelle "the most virile and sincere writer of the Algerian country," and if the reader wants still more diversified and still more vividly flashing pictures of North-African life than are contained in this and its sister volume, "*Notes de Route,*" it is hard to say where he will find them.

In her young years, when under the charge of an old granduncle at Geneva, she had been brought up "absolutely as a boy." And now on horseback, alone and disguised as

an Arab youth, she traversed the inner parts of Algeria and Tunisia from the borders of Morocco to those of Tripoli. These volumes are records of her journeyings, impressions of scenery interspersed with tales of native life and her own reflections; they unfold a vast and varied panorama—crumbling cities through whose narrow streets you stumble in the twilight amid piles of foul refuse, calm Arab convent retreats, where white-robed marabouts glide about like ghosts, the busy life of the green oasis gardens; anon you are riding under a fiery sun through some gorge of scintillating rocks or reposing awhile with the eternal wanderers in their black tents perched on a weltering desolation of sand dunes; every aspect of native life flits past your eye—the soldiery, merchants, womenfolk and humble laborers; they all disclose their joys and hopes and sufferings; you feel, after reading these pages, as if you had been gazing upon one of those glowing Oriental tapestries full of bold tints that yet harmonize in a miraculous fashion and suggest, rather than reveal, some simple underlying design.

What is it—this sense of a fundamental simplicity pervading the whole? It is the character of Isabelle Eberhardt herself.

She possesses the first requisite of a writer: she is non-derivative—true to her nature.

And her nature being essentially Russian, she can sympathize to an exceptional degree with the nomadic Arabs.

For the Russians, unbeknown to themselves, have still much of the nomad in them. Where is a country vast as theirs with so few local dialects? Despite the inland passport system which has striven to fix the people to the soil, their roving tendency has triumphed over severe winters, uninhabitable tracts, marshes and immense rivers. Poor men often leave their homes and families on a pilgrimage to some distant shrine exactly as do the Arabs; and so great is their love of wandering that, like a rolling stone once started, they roam across country from one shrine to another, forgetful of their old life, and are often found dead by the roadside. Whole villages migrate about those endless steppes. For rich and poor alike, travelling is an end in itself; they hate all occupations that tie them down to a particular spot; landed proprietors easily transfer their affections from one place to another, buying and selling estates in different corners of the land; they will think noth-

ing of going from Petersburg to Odessa on the pretext of purchasing a hat or a pair of gloves. Railway stations resemble gypsy encampments; second-class hotels, littered with the travellers' cooking apparatus, pillows, towels, samovars and all the heterogeneous impedimenta of nomadism, are simple caravansaries. Houses look as if they were not intended to be permanently occupied; nothing has been or ever will be long in its place; the clocks are not going, the doors not shut—an instinctive recollection of a former breezy tent life; there is a surprising lack of furniture, especially of the kind which the Anglo-Saxon requires for storing away clothes and "settling down." Russians never settle down. They all have something in common with the dyspeptic old prince in one of Tourguenieff's novels: rooms are put to new uses, beds moved from one place to another out of sheer restlessness and love of change. They will live for weeks in a chaotic confusion that could be remedied by half an hour's work, but they are buoyed up by the hereditary notion that soon the encampment must be broken up and the family moved elsewhere. Arabs! The Swiss thinks of the particular house or village where he was born; the Russian has not sense of home as a geographical point, but as a social centre; he is at home anywhere so long as his tribe is about him. So you will find him at continental watering-places; never, like the Englishman, alone, but moving about in clans and batches, as the Arabs do.

These instances of surviving nomadism in Russia, which could be multiplied indefinitely, are here enumerated not by way of explaining things to the lover of that country, who is apt to regard them as a bundle of disconnected national traits, or to the hostile critic for whom the detestable but firmly rooted autocratic system would become more intelligible at least if he could be brought to realize that it merely represents the nomadic family principle of which every household in the land is a replica. They are referred to because traceable in literature just as much as in daily life.

This does not mean that Isabelle Eberhardt, for example, was gadding across country all day long with a portmanteau slung over her shoulders. But it means that the nomad's definite but indefinable states of yearning and exaltation, the nostalgic note, are prominent in these volumes. She has the "*gout de l'espace*"—the "*volupté profonde de la vie errante.*"

To the wandering family every pleasure of life is uncertain, for to-morrow the settlement may be broken up and the delights, which to-day offers, indefinitely postponed. So the Russian, like the nomadic Magyar or Arab, imposes little restraint upon himself in the matter of "wine, women and song"; he seizes upon the joys of life with a zest and almost theatrical exaggeration, and this, again, is reflected in his literature. But it may be said—it has been said—that this characteristic is rather the result of a harsh climate; that it is a protest, on the part of humanity, against the inclemency of physical surroundings; that mankind, to counteract the effects of such sombre conditions of nature, will tend towards spiritual excesses. There may be some truth in the general argument. No doubt the hysterical Scandinavian lore bears traces of such violent changes of summer and winter, light and darkness, as are unknown "under the roof of blue Ionian weather." But the influence of environment has become a fetich, a kind of *deus ex machina* that explains away all difficulties. In the present instance the habits of the Russians contrast significantly with the steadiness to which a longer social stability has accustomed the equally boreal Finlanders; the idiosyncrasies of the dreamy and restless Arab are altogether absent in the plodding Berber peasant, although he has dwelt far longer in this glowing and fateful land of Africa.

No, it is a matter of race and not of soil; and so much for Isabelle's nomadism.

As to her intellectuality: open these volumes where you will and the fact will thrust itself upon you.

This is the way she sees things:

*"Les passants sont rares.*

*"Parfois un fellah, poussant devant lui un petit âne disparaissant sous une charge de palmes qui frolent les murs avec un bruissement métallique. L'homme marche, l'œil vague, le bâton sur l'épaule, tenu très droit, d'un geste hieratique comme on en voit aux personnages des bas-reliefs égyptiens. Il chante pour lui tout seul, doucement, une vieille mélodie berbère; il échange quelques salam distraits avec les fantômes blancs immobiles le long des murs. Une vieille parait, courbée sous une outre pesante. Assis ou à demi couchés sur les bancs de terre, les ksouriens berbères, blancs, où les kharatine, autochtones noirs parlent sans hâte, se grisant d'ombre et d'immobilité longue."*

And thus she feels them:

*"Il fait bon s'endormir ainsi n'importe où à la belle étoile, en sachant qu'on s'en ira le lendemain et qu'on ne reviendra sans doute jamais, que tout ce qui est ne durera pas . . . tandis que chantent les bedouins, tandis*

*que pleurent les djouak,\* tandis que s'évapore et s'éteint, comme une flamme inutile, la pensée."*

There is nothing remarkable in these extracts; they are only cited to show her point of view, which is that of a refined intelligence.

Many of her sketches, such as "Meriema," the tale of the old woman who has lost her wits through the death of her son, or the mysterious figure of the young flute-player among the mouldering palaces of Tunis, the "*Pleurs d'Amandier*" and at least twenty others, are original in the good sense of the word; they are both new and truthful. And they will bear close scrutiny. Take that little one on "Lizards," for instance; or, in the other volume, the bizarre "*Joies Noires*." Here is not only fine observation, but a pronounced personal cachet sustained by scholarship and love of letters; these things are much more than clever studies thrown off in a happy moment—they are the product of an independent mind which has gauged the resources of language, discriminating its beauties and realizing its limitations.

The translator may well despair of preserving their strange and voluptuous aroma: it evaporates in his crucible.

"*J'ai toujours été simple*," says Isabelle, "*et dans cette simplicité j'ai trouvé des jouissances fortes*." Nothing is more true if by simple she means limpid, homogeneous. Unlike that Russian stone, the Alexandrite, she shines with the same steady glow, view her in what light you will; there may be flaws, but they are not the flaws of other people; a welcome quality in an age which produces so many human creatures and so many books, which are merely reflections. And her opinions have been formed in the only way in which opinions that are worth anything can be formed: by copious reading—not to learn, but, as the English sage has put it, "to weigh and consider"—and by contact with actualities, with the shifting world of men and the wild places of nature. She has drawn deep breaths of life; she has suffered and pondered and pined in solitude:

*"C'est la plus déshéritée des déshéritées de ce monde, une exilée sans foyer et sans patrie, une orpheline dénuée de tout, qui écrit ces lignes. Elles sont sincères et vraies."*

And elsewhere:

\* The pastoral reed of the Bedouins.

*"J'en arrive à cette conclusion, qu'il ne faut jamais chercher le bonheur. Il passe sur la route, mais toujours en sens inverse. . . .*

*"Quand mon cœur souffrait, il commençait à vivre."*

These gropings and strivings of mind have given poignancy to her language and a touch of mellow humanity, the antithesis of that hard machine-made glitter, that supercilious juggling with the obvious, which is praised as " profundity " in the works of some writers of her sex.

It will never do to underestimate her arduous journalistic training, those days when, locked in her little room, she wrestled with her thoughts and words, for it was thus that she learned to avoid the pitfalls that beset the writers of her own race more than those of any other—diffusiveness, lack of concentrative grasp. Russians will tell you that the sight of hedges, so familiar to lovers of our landscapes, is irksome to their notions of liberty; they must have a measureless horizon, and as their bodies roam so do their minds. This wilful prolixity, this " wandering from the point," constitutes their conversational charm, their literary failing; they reach out too far and must perforce include it all. So an officer of my acquaintance, who has been engaged for sixteen years upon a history of his country's rule in Central Asia, has at last, he tells me, reached the period of Cyrus; and every one familiar with Russian national literature will have been struck by the same trait; he will muse upon the number of writers that have been altogether lost to their country through their recoil at the imaginary dimensions of their task. Manifold ambitions paralyze the initiative; an all-embracing mind is a dungeon unto itself.

There is none of this straining in Isabelle; she never sees too much at a time; she knows her limitations and those of her theme. That training taught her to think rapidly and surely, to eliminate the trivial; she deletes remorselessly, as can be seen by a glance at the "*Notes de Route*," where some of the old variants are printed below the new text. She is perpetually dissatisfied and a believer in conscientious labor rather than in inspiration; a born writer for the rest and " irresistibly drawn towards the career of letters." " I write," she says, " because I like the process of literary creation; I write, as I love, because such is my destiny probably. And it is my sole true consolation."

But whoever looks for what might be called photographic reproductions of desert life in these pages will be disap-

pointed; there is mirage hanging about them; like all artists, she detects colors and shapes invisible to the ordinary eye; or, again, she is deliberately blind; her pictures of this "holy land of Africa" are distortions almost in the sense of Turner's landscape: distortions, that is, till we have risen to her point of view and learned to know better. And those abysmal desert silences, those spaces of tawny desolation over which the eye roams and vainly seeks a point of repose, often turned her thoughts inward and invested her, as they do the Arabs, with their dream states.

*"Oh! la bienheureuse annihilation de moi, dans cette vie contemplative du désert! . . . Parfois cependant il est encore de ces heures troublées où l'esprit et la conscience, je ne sais pourquoi, se réveillent de leur longue somnolence et nous torturent. . . .*

*"Combien de fois n'ai-je pas senti mon cœur se serrer en songeant à ma vocation d'écrire et de penser, à mon ancien amour de l'étude et des livres, à mes curiosités intellectuelles de jadis. . . . Heures de remords, d'angoisse et de deuil. Mais ces sentiments n'ont presque jamais d'action sur la volonté qui reste inerte et n'agit point."*

Herein lies the justification of that subjective method which she handles so craftily.

An interesting phenomenon in literature, this modern taste for personalities, fostered, as it may well have been, by the interviewer who has accustomed us to pry into the most intimate details of our neighbors' private lives. Certain it is that the position of a descriptive writer towards his public has undergone a change of late; readers have become anthropomorphous, connoisseurs of sensations; they commune with an author not only for what he writes, but for what he is; they endeavor to spy into the windows of his soul and to overhear him chronicling his most casual moods and impressions. They want to learn how things affect him. And there is a contagion in wisely premeditated indiscretions on the part of a veracious writer and a profit—namely, that from sharing his feelings we are insensibly led to adopt his views; we gain, that is, a definite acquisition of knowledge. But whoever is not constitutionally honest had better remain impersonal. Errors of fact or judgment will pass, but to win our confidence he must ring true. In other words, the chronicling of moods depends upon whose moods they are. Those of Isabelle Eberhardt are sincere and interesting.

Apart from that catholicity of hers which transports us



with equal ease through such varied phases of African existence, one point must strike every careful reader: her sense of propriety in regard to the length of these sketches. That there are picturesque vignettes in the scenery of life that look best in the microscopic setting of a sonnet or even an epigram; that fleeting emotions will befit the prose poem, compact entities the short tale, while whoever wishes to delineate the teeming markets of mankind and mountains and meandering streams and all the orographical and hydrographical complexities of continents must call for the Gargantuan canvas of "Anna Karenina": these are surely very obvious rules. But how often are they violated, even by writers of reputation! These pieces, however, have frames suitable to their size; some, like the "*Petit Monde de Femmes*," are the veriest miniatures, while the mournful "Fellah," for instance, trails its sad length along, a monotone of "misery, falling drop by drop"; a kind of literary bas-relief. Short or long, they read so uncommonly easily that their technique will repay study as illustrating that remark of Sheridan's to a lady: "Easy reading, Madam, is damned hard writing." And throughout it all we are never without an exhilarating sense of motion; the camels are groaning, the tents must be struck. This is what takes away from these sketches the air of a set purpose and invests them with an impromptu charm.

It was possibly this note of vibrating realism which induced some people to call Isabelle a "*décadente*," that being a favorite term for much that is new, vital and, therefore, *not yet labelled* (the unforgivable sin). A futile word! When one has watched how men like Verlaine and Richard Wagner have changed from decadents into classics in the course of a short generation, it may be wise to hold one's peace and wait events. There is no doubt whatever that Homer was a decadent in his day; and as to Sappho . . .

This is far from saying that her pages contain the "*dernier mot*" of such literature, since what fulfils the needs of to-day is sure to be found inadequate for the morrow. So with this love for the desert. The Sahara that existed formerly, only in its terrifying aspects of heat and thirst, was discovered, like the Alps, by the romanticists. Then came, let us say, Fromentin; this we said is the truth, and the whole truth, at last—a revelation; the desert as a mode of art! But soon enough there followed Loti; the

attitude of the spectator, incurious, scarce human; an antidote, in its chill neo-classicism, to the extravagances towards which Fromentin was leading us.

And now we have Isabelle, to whom the desert is not a mode of art, but a mode of life.

She is merged into those sand wastes, not by æsthetic intuition, but by identity of temperament. Unity of race, religion and language is a powerful national bond, but the peculiarity of the Russians, as a people, is the same as that of the Arabs: it lies in a sentiment of brotherhood in a kind of apostolic spirit that binds together every class of the empire and has its roots in their patriarchal institutions. The way in which some poor desert-man will address the great sheikh of his tribe reminds one of the humble moujik's affectionate references to the little father of whose household he is, after all, a member. Isabelle, as Arab and Russian, has broad fraternal feelings—"we are all poor devils," she says, "and they who refuse to understand us are still poorer than ourselves." She knows a test for discovering the virtue lurking in the breasts of the meanest human creatures—the test of her own worthlessness; she would even find it possible to say a good word for those savages of Albion who vulgarize desert life by establishing decent roads and communications whereby emotional travellers, prancing over the wilderness in sumptuous seed-pearl embroidered dressing-gowns, may jot down its beauties for readers of the "*Figaro*" without having their throats cut.

One cannot help detecting resemblances to Loti in these pages. Like him, for example, she has grasped the peculiar color value of harsh scientific or commercial words. How, in a flow of purely literary speech, they hold the eye—these crude importations from an alien realm of thought! They seem to complete the picture, like the poppies in a field of wheat. And, of course, she has studied with profit her Fromentin, in whose two volumes, particularly the "*Été dans le Sahara*," she learned the uses of that focussing or intensifying faculty which constitutes much of the charm of writers as different as Balzac or George Borrow. In this land of "menacing monotony" the artistic mind dwells lovingly upon the minutiae of human affairs, the result being a magnified visualization; the Arabs of Isabelle are so vital and palpitating that your ordinary ones melt away in their presence like misty phantoms. Elsewhere we are reminded

of the aerial butterfly touch of Hearn; of Maeterlinck's love of pictured metaphor:

*"Que j'aime la verdure exubérante et les troncs vivants, plissés d'une peau d'éléphant, de ces figuiers gonflés de lait amer, autour desquelles bourdonnent des essaims de mouches dorées!"*

But what will strike him as her dominant note is that sense of measure, all the more to be appreciated in a young woman who knew so much concerning her subject, who felt so keenly and could wield so fluent a pen. Remembering that these sketches were written for a provincial newspaper, one appreciates all the more highly her conscientious work.

Nevertheless, the man who should profess to be able to imagine nothing better than these descriptions of Isabelle's would only prove that he has reached the limit of his powers of assimilation. So it is. We grow tired of the strain of novelty—for it is a strain; we sometimes even cast off as too exhausting our most recent author friends and revert to those of our youth in whom we affect to discover beauties hitherto unrevealed, thus making a virtue of a physiological necessity, weariness. Her work is of the kind that can only be done once satisfactorily; the perusal of her imitators or disciples, of whom there are three or four on the French literary market just now, illustrates sufficiently the difference between the reality and its shadow. It is difficult, indeed, to conceive another writer emerging upon the scene with the very unusual equipment she possessed: to be both man and woman, a scholar and a savage of the waste, a visionary hashish devotee and *fin-de-siècle* journalist; a Mohammedan, Christian and agnostic.

Yes, another generation may well find her too ardently personal (for we shall soon be outgrowing the anthropomorphous stage once more) and perhaps also, too restless. Carlyle somewhere says that the nomad lacks the "tendency to persevere." Very true: they only sow who care to wait for the harvest. There is Oudjda, for instance, that sombre city of putrefaction and death which grows fair only after sunset when, as in a dream, one hears the Aissouyiahs praying "*dans la sérénité pudique de la nuit, voilant la pourriture des choses, la souffrance et l'abjection des êtres*": how one longs, after reading those few pages, to know more about such a place as this, to live oneself into it! But—no. With the swiftness of doom the scenery is shifted and "*c'est*

*la fin. Le somptueux rideau vert et argent des oliviers s'est renfermé sur toutes ces courtes visions."*

For the rest it is always easy to discover defects in our favorites once we have grown tired of them.

A new edition might profitably give translations of the many Arabic words which bristle in this one: what does the ordinary European know of *souafa*, *guira*, *djemaa*, *hamada*, *harair*, *djellaba*, *ihram*, *mhlahfa*, *taleb*, *sehan*, *zeriba*, *cagna*, *kouma*, *targui*, *toubib* and the rest of them? This is rather an ultra-virile method of introducing local color.

*"J'ai toujours été simple . . ."*

That, we believe, was likewise the conviction of Marie Bashkirtseff, who, despite her different fortune, resembles Isabelle in her aspirations—to escape from a world of sordid trivialities to leave a mark. And highly must we rate these children of the North who found unaided the true remedy for those brooding states that clog the mind and warp the character in activities.

True, they possessed the advantage of belonging to a race which has not undergone the schooling of the rest of Europe, which has not obfuscated its mind with metaphysics, classical ideals and "*Sturm-und-Drang*"; which is enabled, therefore, to graft the latest fruits of modern research upon a sound primitive stock. All this has its drawbacks, no doubt. Ignorant and even scornful of Hellenic traditions, their mundane art lacks the element of repose and concentrative thought; untutored by a Renaissance, their Church art languishes in ancient conventional grooves and displays nothing of that persistent and active regard for a high ideal which has culminated in the dome of St. Peter or the Madonnas of Rafael. But in literature and speculative thought the profit is largely on their side, for they have not been told during long centuries what to see on earth and how to see it. As a literary nation, they are inflamed with youthful ardor; they know morality in the human way and not in that of medieval schoolmen; they have instinctively grasped the fact that our sense of right and wrong, were it old as the hills, alters its shape day by day as surely as these do; that virtue is merely an adaptation to ever-changing surroundings which stamp our affairs with their momentary impress.

This anti-parochialism is what gives to the writings of both of them an elevating, aristocratic note, for morality is

the property of the crowd; it bears an inscription which damns it for all purposes of art: *connu!*

Yet Isabelle, like many artists of natural nobility, is a democrat:

*"On m'a souvent reproché de me plaire avec les gens du peuple. Mais où donc est la vie, sinon dans le peuple? Partout ailleurs le monde me semble étroit. . . . A vrai dire, je ne souffre pas trop des pauvretés et des naïvetés, pas même des grossièretés. Je n'en souffre pas profondément. Ce qui me semble à la longue insupportable, c'est l'éternelle honte médiocre de certains gens. . . ."*

For purposes of insight into a race like the Arabs the advantages of being a woman are twofold; she has not only access into their veiled and intimate life, but also, what is more important, she is less disposed to theorize, to read wrong meanings into what she sees, less prone to err in interpreting primordial tracts of feeling—less introspective, in short. A man can rarely immerse himself in the strange life of a savage race with the naïf abandonment of a woman. And if he can, he is a savage himself, unable to communicate his experiences to others; there is not enough of the child and barbarian left in him; he is no longer permeable, having donned too many garments of culture in the past. As a writer and observer he may do something better in his way—we are thinking at this moment of Doughty's Arabia—but that spirit of freemasonry with an alien stock which comes naturally to a woman like Laurence Hope would argue, in a man, a quite exceptional detachment or a feminine turn of mind. "*J'ai voulu posséder ce pays,*" says Isabelle, "*et ce pays m'a possédée.*" *Ce pays m'a possédée:* there you have it.

This elective affinity of some women for wild and destructive races of mankind: is it that their development has been arrested at the emotional stage when, as children, we were wont to delight in pirate adventures and redskin-scalpings, or because, seriously reflecting, they think to discover in this return to barbarism a remedy for the self-questionings and the social complexities of modern days? Whatever be the reason, a man will not so often have these "*jouissances fortes*"—a term under which we are to understand a throbbing sympathy with everything, good or bad, that the country or its people offers.

Isabelle's philosophy, like that of Marie Bashkirtseff, is summed up in a determination to keep every pore open, and

it is worth remarking that both of them stand ethically, as they do geographically, midway between East and West. They are Occidental in their enjoyment of novelty and strenuous labor, but sufficiently Buddhistic to despise the delirious bustle and herd spirit of our civilization; to detest every form of Western hypocrisy.

In matters pertaining to the sexes Isabelle has the cynicism of the Oriental. These volumes of hers contain some pages not exactly fitted for that young person who is still supposed to linger, like the Apteryx, in remote sylvan glades, but, on the whole, they are pervaded by a refreshing sanity.

She says, for example:

*"L'amour le plus décevant et le plus pernicieux me semble être surtout la tendance occidentale vers l'âme-sœur. . . . Gloire à ceux qui vont seuls dans la vie! Si malheureux qu'ils soient, ce sont les forts et les saints, les seuls êtres. Les autres ne sont que des moitiés d'âme."*

Was ever a fine Crim-Tartary truth more plainly enunciated? That fateful idealism of ours: it clings to us like a Nessus shirt!

It may be asked what reflections such as this have to do with a description of the Tunisian desert? Why, simply this: they are the outcome of a mood created by local conditions and in so far help us to understand them. Here, face to face with infinities, man disencumbers himself; he casts off outworn weeds of thought and feeling; he stands alone; he must act; he cannot be bothered with a sister soul; the caravan is waiting to begin the march, and at night, after a meagre repast, he will drop from sheer physical fatigue into a dreamless sleep. An anodyne, this, for many ills. . . .

In their revolt against every form of crooked emotionalism these Russian girls have struck a new note and the right one. There is a charming chapter in the "*Ombre de l'Islam*" where Isabelle describes supper-time at the Mellah, the Jew quarter; its stench, its vulgarity, its "*bonheur facile*."

*"Je connais très bien leur âme: Elle monte dans les vapeurs de la marmite. . . . Je les envie d'être ainsi. Ils sont la critique de mon romantisme et de cet incurable malaise que j'ai apporté du Nord et de l'Orient mystique avec le sang de ceux qui ont vagabondé avant moi dans la steppe."*

*"Quand donc aurai-je fini avec cette singulière manie qui me porte à interpreter les gestes les plus simples dans un sens religieux? . . . Quand les autres font cuire leur diner, nous pensons au sacrifice de la Soma, aux libations de beurre sur le feu."*

*"Loin de moi les tâtonnements de mon adolescence maladive! . . . Toute mon éducation morale est à refaire."*

In the face of such pitiless self-criticism, how absurd to call her "neurotic": as if it were not a symptom of uncommon healthfulness to be able to review oneself in this objective fashion. It would be more correct to say that Isabelle has taken the gold of the romantic movement and discarded the dross—the slobbering cant, the sentimentality. Her sound barbaric ethics are untainted by the virus of pruriency; her whole religion resumes itself into a rather spasmodic, sisterly hankering after an honest God, a kind of blandly beaming *bon vieux* such as Lucretius had in mind.

Marie Bashkirtseff was an anti-sentimentalist of the same type—her attitude towards the male sex was one of playful sanity. The good Mathilde Blind used to regret that Marie had not lived long enough to meet her "ideal." But the fact seems to be that these Russian girls are seldom on the lookout for ideals. And it is rather instructive to observe that they often find something less vaporous, something that wears better. How does it come about? Can it be that, although they are in one sense "New Women," they nevertheless belong to a variety different from the odd compound of childishness and ferocity which goes by that name—to a class of female with whom a man discovers rational companionship to be not altogether out of the question?

Isabelle tried the experiment and found it a success. In the year 1900, at the age of twenty-three, she married, according to Mohammedan rites, a native officer, naturalized Frenchman, to whom she was much attached (like many of her sex, she always had a weakness for the soldiery).

And there occurred next year an unpleasant episode. While near Eloued she was attacked by a religious fanatic who belonged to a confraternity hostile to hers and so severely wounded that she lay for a month in the military hospital of that town. This was followed by an order for her expulsion from Algerian territory for "political reasons"—an order only applicable as against non-Frenchmen (she was still an alien, the authorities having forbidden the pair to make their religious union valid by a civil marriage). Vainly she applied to the Russian Consulate to learn the reason of this step. She had been accused ere this of anti-French propaganda, a charge she vehemently denied; they had even gone so far as to suspect her of being an English Methodist

in disguise. Isabelle Eberhardt a Methodist! Truly a wondrous juxtaposition of ideas. But the French are a wondrous nation: their pathological suspiciousness of the outsider reminds one of those old Athenians. By no effort of will-power or imagination can they put themselves into the mental condition of foreigners; it is an odd little weakness of theirs; impossible to believe the depths of credulity to which this *idée fixe* sometimes leads them. Foreigners suffer, for there are moments when the most innocuous of them objects to living in the publicity of *Le Roi Soleil*; when those *concierge* reports, those genteel but persistent questionings, that police *dossier* which dogs his footsteps, be he in African deserts or in the heart of Paris, makes him wish that this modern nation were a little less—how shall we say?—a little less Hellenic.\*

In exile at Marseilles, separated from her husband, without money and still suffering from the effects of her wound, a hard life began; such was her necessity that she was obliged to work as a dock-hand with the Italian laborers of that port; instead of cigarettes she smoked "*feuilles de platane*." But presently the husband contrived to exchange into another regiment which brought him to Marseilles; here they were remarried according to French law and Isabelle, now following the domicile of her husband, became a French citizen and returned to Algeria in despite of her proscription.

They seem to have established their headquarters at that little cantonment of Ain Sefra which she has so well described and to have lived there happily till the day when the house was invaded by cataracts of slime brought down in that flood of October, 1904.

It cost Isabelle her life.

"I can swim," she told him. "I will hold you up." She was trying to patch together some kind of raft when the masonry suddenly yielded to the pressure of the waters and fell upon her, the husband escaping by a miracle. They recovered her body two days later and entombed it in the native cemetery on the bleak hillside near some crumbling

\* Georges Clarétie relates how he once accompanied the *Contrôleur* of Tozeur on a delicate official pursuit after English lady Methodists who, disguised as natives, had been making a dangerous anti-French propaganda among the Arabs. But they found nothing; the desert, he says, "kept its secret."



maraboutic shrine. There she lies in the desert sand, and her head is turned towards the East.

It was a short life, but she managed to press the grape to the uttermost drop.

From where these lines have been written, at Nefta on the borders of the Sahara, the eye can follow the track which leads across the burning salt waste of the Chott to Elcued, her elected home. It gives a pungency to these pages, and one shapes in fancy some picture of this tall Arab youth, with the child-like smile, riding yonder on that much-beloved white Soufi stallion.

“*Je ne me suis pas composé un idéal; j’ai marché à la découverte.*” That is the key-note of her life.

And one remembers that other intellectual nomad, Marie Bashkirtseff, who also found a “*frisson intérieur*” necessary to her “*hygiène morale*”; who was likewise forever learning and marching to the discovery of new horizons. For a mental state such as theirs, appetency rather than instability is the right word. Their writings are neither of the kind to which we go for information, nor of the purely æsthetic species; they belong to the category of confessions or mirrors of the soul: human documents, to use Mr. Mallock’s happy phrase, that disclose the rainbow-tinted world as it filters through the medium of a single candid intelligence. Neither of the two can be called a creative artist. But they are women of keen and yet disciplined impressionability and, in so far, a delectable offshoot from the ordinary trend of feminism.

NORMAN DOUGLAS.